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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL ETTC PTER HR CH LE KPAL SU RS GG EZ IR EUN
SUBJECT: CZECHS ON GAERC, CHINA ARMS EMBARGO, HIZBALLAH AND
SYRIAN FM VISIT

REF: A. STATE 39909
B. STATE 44309
C. STATE 44087
D. STATE 44486
E. STATE 44347

Classified By: Political Officer Kimberly C. Krhounek for reasons 1.4(b)
) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. On March 14, we met with Mr. Michal Strouhal, Director of the Common Foreign and Security Policy Department in the Czech MFA, to discuss the GAERC (ref a), China Arms Embargo (ref b), and visit of Syrian FM to Europe (ref c). We also delivered the statement on U.S. support of the EU-3 diplomacy in Iran (ref d) and the non-paper on Hizballah (ref e). On the China Arms Embargo, Strouhal noted that this issue is not on the GAERC agenda, but that the EU would expect some progress on human rights from China before making a decision to lift the embargo. The EU is still a long way from reaching a consensus decision to designate both the military and political wings of Hizballah as terrorist organizations; roughly eight EU Member Countries still maintain objections at the technical level, although the Czechs and Dutch have expressed support at the ministerial level. Strouhal agreed that the April timing of the Syrian FM's planned visit to Italy was "not appropriate" and expected the recent developments in Lebanon to be the main focus of the GAERC's Middle East discussions. The USG decision to support the EU-3 on Iran was warmly welcomed as an important "follow-up to President Bush's trip to Europe." Septel will discuss Ambassador's March 15 meeting with the Foreign Minister, with additional input on these topics. End Summary.

GAERC MEETING, CHINA ARMS AND HIZBALLAH

12. (U) Strouhal provided the following responses to the issues to be discussed in the upcoming GAERC meeting in Brussels:

1A. (C) CHINA ARMS EMBARGO: Strouhal noted that the issue of lifting the EU's embargo on arms sales to China is not on the agenda of the March GAERC. He added that Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui had recently appealed to the Czechs to encourage the EU to lift the arms embargo during an official visit to Prague on March 10. But the issue of human rights was not forgotten, as Yesui's visit coincided with a demonstration against Chinese occupation of Tibet which occurred on the same day outside of the MFA. Strouhal said that the Chinese DFM made a well-reasoned argument for lifting the arms embargo, but that he believed that the EU would need to see some signs of progress on human rights from China before it would make a final decision to lift the embargo, since "they should not get something for nothing."

1B. (C) CROATIA: Strouhal said the Czechs are in the middle of the two EU camps concerning Croatia's Accession; the GOOR is strongly supportive of Croatia's Accession, but it is also a strong supporter of the ICTY and wants to see Gotovina delivered to The Hague. Strouhal stated that the COREPER discussion last week showed EU firmness on this issue and he did not believe that the EU would agree to open negotiations until there is "full compliance" by Croatia with the ICTY. He added that there would not be a GAERC conclusion on this issue, but there would likely be a declaration reiterating the EU position towards Croatia.

1C. (C) UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS: Strouhal affirmed that Belarus and Cuba are among the priorities for the GOOR at the UNCHR (along with Burma, Sudan, Palestinian Authority and Israel). The Czechs plan to take the floor in support of the Cuba resolution debate and will assist the USG in lobbying other countries to join them. Strouhal said that there is still no EU consensus on Chechnya, Sudan or Uzbekistan.

1D. (C) MIDDLE EAST PEACE: Strouhal said the GAERC discussions on the Middle East this month would be largely focused on the current situation in Lebanon. The Czechs believe that it is very important for Lebanon to "gain its sovereignty" and realize a full withdrawal of Syrian soldiers. Also, during Solana's regular visits to the region he has been actively working with Egypt on the Gaza

withdrawal and encouraging their role in the MEPP process. The first reports required under the action plans of the "EU Neighborhood Policy" for Egypt, Lebanon and three Caucasus states were recently published and should be on the GAERC agenda for April.

E. (C) HIZBALLAH: Strouhal said that at the February EU GAERC, the Czech DFM in attendance spoke in favor of putting the designation of Hizballah as a terrorist organization on the next agenda, and he was strongly supported by the Netherlands. This demonstrated that there is support for this issue at the ministerial level, but at the EU clearinghouse, which is a technical level group, several countries strongly oppose the designation, while an additional 5 remain more passively opposed. Because of this, the EU is still a long way from reaching a consensus agreement on Hizballah; however, he added that written information on the organization is helpful to the discussion and thanked us for delivery of the non-paper (ref e).

F. (C) SUDAN: Strouhal said the Czech Republic strongly agreed that Sudan must "fully and unconditionally" implement the peace agreements and reaffirmed the Czech plans (noted previously in paragraph C), that the GOCR supports a country-specific human rights resolution on Sudan at the UNCHR. As for trying Sudanese human rights violators, he noted that the Czech Republic has signed, but not ratified, the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court, which makes its position somewhat awkward within the EU, since it also does not yet legally recognize the ICC.

G. (C) RUSSIA: Strouhal said that the main focus of EU efforts towards Russia are the four "spheres of cooperation" on which they are trying to reach agreement prior to the next EU-Russia summit. Thus far, only the agreement on cultural cooperation has been completed, and troubles remain in the remaining three which concern internal, external and security issues. The EU wants to implement these four agreements as a package, whereas the Russians want to implement them as they are negotiated and completed. Right now, one of the areas of biggest friction is the link between "frozen conflicts" within the EU's new neighborhood policy. On the issue of the border monitoring mission, Strouhal said that the EU was prepared to help with training of guards and other assistance, but that only a few EU member states support the idea of taking over the OSCE border monitoring mission and turning it into a ESDP action. For now, the EU focus is on keeping the existing OSCE border mission in place.

IRAN AND SYRIA

13. (C) Strouhal said that the EU member states were very pleased with the U.S. decision to actively and publicly support EU-3 diplomacy on discouraging Iran's nuclear ambitions (ref d). It was, he said, "an important follow-up to President Bush's trip to Europe." Strouhal was not aware of the planned visit of Syrian FM Sha'ara's visit to Italy on April 6, but he agreed that with the recent developments in Lebanon, that the timing was not appropriate for such a trip.

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